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Kou, Anu; Mulder, Clara H.; Bailey, Ajay

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## ‘For the sake of the family and future’: the linked lives of highly skilled Indian migrants

Anu Kōu<sup>a</sup>, Clara H. Mulder<sup>a</sup> and Ajay Bailey<sup>a,b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Population Research Centre, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands;

<sup>b</sup>Dr. T. M. A. Pai Endowed Chair in Qualitative Methods, Manipal University, Manipal, India

### ABSTRACT

While in Western literature, migration is generally considered an individual or (nuclear) household phenomenon, Indian context adds the strong presence of parents and extended family to the constellation. This paper addresses how significant others shape the life course events and the migration trajectories of highly skilled Indian migrants to the Netherlands and UK. We employ a qualitative approach to the life course framework to highlight the linked lives that can alter the migration decisions. Our findings are drawn from 47 semi-structured biographic interviews. The results underscore how further migration decisions are often informed by the implications of the different life stages of the linked lives, the key elements being care-giving by and for the parents. Furthermore, we also illustrate how migration provides space for negotiating social norms and expectations: due to the geographical distance between migrants and their parents, the local (non-Indian) context plays a bigger role and thus the need for and timing of conformity with norms can be postponed. The understanding of family life in transnational settings will be enriched when individuals are embedded within the cultural background and linked lives are extended beyond the immediate nuclear family.

### KEYWORDS

High-skilled migration; linked lives; life course trajectories; India; the Netherlands; United Kingdom

## Introduction

Each generation is bound to fateful decisions and events in the other’s life course. (Elder 1985, 40)

Shamila<sup>1</sup> was living and working in Mumbai, when her parents arranged her marriage. She then left her job to move in with her husband Ramesh and his family in Hyderabad, and became a housewife. After a few years their first child was born, and thereafter the family moved to Bangalore where Ramesh had found a new job. About a year later, Shamila decided to return to the labour market, therefore her parents-in-law moved in with them in order to help with the child care. Another year later, Ramesh got employed in the UK, so Shamila quit her job to join her husband abroad with their child. She also found a job in the new country, thus Ramesh’s mother migrated to the UK every six months in the

**CONTACT** Anu Kōu [anukou@gmail.com](mailto:anukou@gmail.com)

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following years to take care of their child. Two years after their arrival in the UK, the couple had another child. Both Shamila's mother and mother-in-law stayed in the UK for months to look after the children. However, as the couple was living and working in different cities during the week and Shamila even had to travel to Germany for work on a weekly basis, they soon decided it was better for the baby to live in India with Ramesh's mother until both parents found a job in the same city in the UK so that the whole family could live together. Shamila's life course trajectories and the linked lives relating to migration are depicted in Figure 1.

The short glance at Shamila's story exemplifies how the migration of one person initiates migration of their significant others. Migration of an individual should thus not be regarded as an isolated act of movement. To better understand the processes underlying highly skilled migration, it should be viewed as a part of an integral system of previous and future life course events of the migrants and their significant others. Family members are important, if not crucial, in shaping the migration decision of an individual. Findlay et al. (2015) identify linked lives as one of the key elements in the framework for analysing new mobilities across the life course.

The complexity of family migration has been widely acknowledged in the literature (e.g. Bailey and Boyle 2004). However, the focus has been by and large on the migration of couples only; the linked lives of parents and children have been studied to a lesser extent in the migration context. Thus in this paper we include parents and children, which will aid in enriching the understanding of migration mechanisms. Bailey, Blake, and Cooke (2004) examine in this line of reasoning how dual-earner couples make relocation decisions in the context of the linkages to their children and parents and conclude that intergenerational links increase the likelihood of return migration.

Furthermore, calls for research on family and residential relocation have often been made, which would take one step further from the focus on the nuclear family and

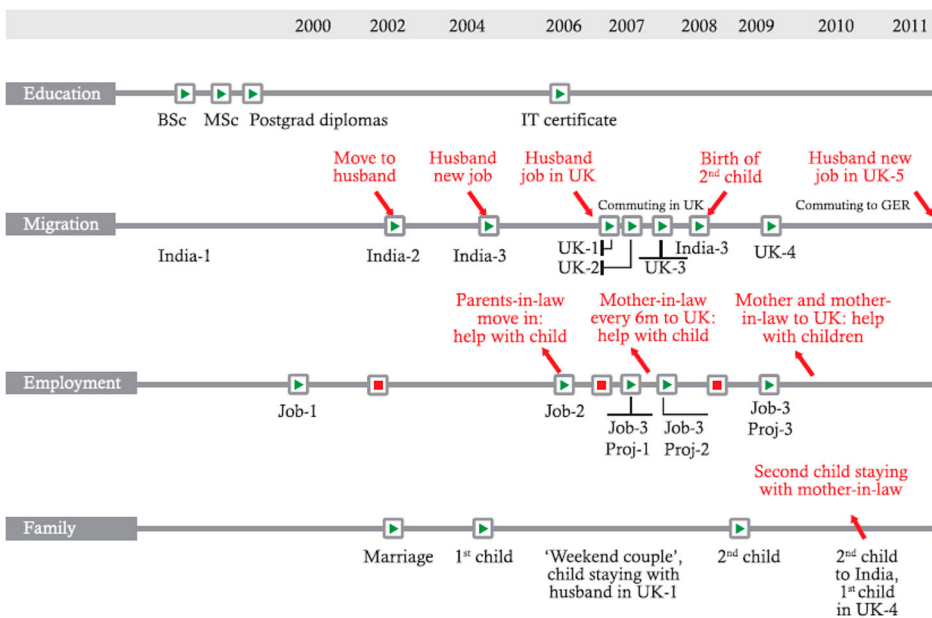


Figure 1. Visualisation of migration and linked lives of Shamila.

explore the relocation links with the extended family members in the countries of origin (Mulder 2007; Cooke 2008a; Mulder and Cooke 2009). Equally importantly, Mulder and Malmberg (2014) point out the need to incorporate local ties (such as family living close by or a job) of a migrant's partner; an aspect that has received relatively little attention in family migration research.

Literature related to family migration tends to be largely West-oriented (Valk and Srinivasan 2011) and does not discuss the role of parents and the extended family (however, see Mulder and Malmberg 2014), which is a central kinship structure in the Indian context. This paper sheds light on the life course choices and patterns of highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and UK, which are linked to their significant others and which often inform their future migration decisions. By adopting a qualitative approach to the life course framework, this paper seeks to provide insights into how the linked lives shape the life courses of highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and UK. We explore the ways in which significant others shape the life courses of highly skilled migrants through 47 biographies. Whereas quantitative frameworks tend to over-emphasise economic-related outcomes of migration, our qualitative research provides a window into the social and cultural aspects migration decisions and patterns (Smith 2004; Köu 2016).

### Linked lives and migration

The life course framework views the development of life paths of individuals over time and in social processes (Elder and Giele 2009). It facilitates 'an ecological understanding of people at the nexus of social pathways, developmental trajectories, and social change' (Daaleman and Elder 2007, 87). Elder (1994) uses the term 'linked lives' to refer to the interaction with and interdependence of social relationships, and thus to recognise the role of others in forming the life course trajectories and transitions of an individual. The lives are linked through life course events and transitions, which can shape the life course trajectories of other persons. The intersections between the life course trajectories of different individuals are embedded in the social, cultural and spatial context (Bailey and Mulder 2017). For instance, migration of a person creates physical distance between them and their parents, and limits the possibilities for intergenerational care exchange. Union formation and childbirth alter the relationships with parents (Kaufman and Uhlenberg 1998) through the mechanism of changing life course statuses to a parent-in-law and a grandparent. Union formation itself brings the life courses of spouses closely together and thus creates mutual dependencies: residential relocation of at least one partner is assumed for cohabitation and migration over longer distances often requires changes in the employment trajectories of both partners.

At the policy level, European Union migration laws regard the family as nuclear family only. As a result of this narrow definition, several important issues are overlooked, such as the '... cultural differences in familial relationships, and the role of grandparents or other collateral relations in providing nurturing and support for different members of the family' (Kofman 2004, 246). Silverstein, Gans, and Yang (2006) emphasise that care-giving is an increasingly important part of the life course. Both the physical ('caring for') and emotional ('caring about') dimensions of care-giving and receiving are present among geographically dispersed families as well (Yeates 2012).

With regard to partnerships, previous research has highlighted the importance of linkages between couple migration and the education and employment trajectories of the male versus female partner. It is generally found that the education and employment of the male partner determine the migration decision (e.g. Bielby and Bielby 1992), leaving the female partner into the role of a tied mover whose employment status is harmed by migration (Boyle et al. 2001). More recently it has been argued that instead of sacrificing their professional careers, (highly educated) women seek opportunities in the migration process even when co-migrating and therefore become active agents rather than passive movers (Hiller and McCaig 2007; Kōu and Bailey 2014). Furthermore, tied staying most likely occurs more frequently than tied moving and affects men and women equally (Smits, Mulder, and Hooimeijer 2003; Cooke 2013).

The presence of children adds a pivotal dimension to the family migration and to the gender perspective within that. Cooke (2008b) describes how couples adopt much more egalitarian gender norms and roles until they have children, but traditional gender norms (i.e. the female partner as a homemaker and the male partner as the breadwinner) emerge once the couple has a child. It is thus rather the 'trailing mother' than 'trailing wife' effect that has negative impact on women's employment status after migration (Cooke 2001). The wife is more likely to have a job than a career (Becker and Moen 1999; Moen and Yu 2000): it is a gendered strategy which involves flexible number of work hours and prescribes the role as a primary caregiver (Leung 2017). Moen and Yu (2000) conclude that it is not the participation in or exit from labour market, but hours in paid work that significantly differentiate gender roles.

The literature thus suggests that linked lives can play a substantial role in life course decisions of migrants. For instance, the care expectations have a direct implication for migrant families who have to arrange the care across borders or relocate for that purpose. This paper focuses on high-skilled migrants and their spouses who are very likely to be highly skilled as well. The higher the wife's education, the more prone the family is to return to their country of origin (Saarela and Finnäs 2013), adding to the family dimension of international migration.

### Linked lives in India

Family is considered to be the centre of social organisations in India (Choudhry 2001). Close family ties are produced and maintained by and large through the extended or joint family system. Lamb (2011, 501) defines a joint family as 'any multigenerational household including at least one senior parent and one married adult child (generally a son) with spouse'. For people in India aged 65 and above, co-residence with (grand)children is the most common living arrangement. Data pertaining to the census in 2011 show that households with 6–8 persons are the largest group, or 24.9% of the total population (Census of India 2011), at the same time total fertility rate was 2.5 (World Bank 2014).

One of the prominent features of India's family system is patrilocality. It focuses specifically on the extended family and underlines the centrality of males through mechanisms such as patrilocal residence and patrilineal succession (Seymour 1995). The wife is thus expected to move to the extended family household of her husband, and she is not only considered to marry her husband, but equally importantly she will then be regarded as a vital part of his family (Mines and Lamb 2002). The life course of a woman will be

strongly linked not only to her husband, but also to his parents and possibly to other members of the extended family (see Roohi 2017).

In the Indian context, marriage is viewed as ‘an economic and social bond for religious and cultural groups’ and as ‘a key vehicle through which a family’s status is expressed or improved’ (Bhopal 2011, 433). Because marriage is regarded to be contracted between families rather than individuals, arranging marriage for their children is one of the most salient concerns for parents (Mooney 2006; Gopalkrishnan and Babacan 2007). More than 90% of Indians marry through the arranged marriage system (Mullatti 1995). Parents and other senior kin seek for marriage partners based on various criteria, such as the education, employment, caste and religion of the candidate and the wealth and reputation of the family. In urban India and in the Indian diaspora, more recently, parents and ‘marriageable’ men and women are relying on matrimonial websites to find a spouse. It has been argued that the easy access to such websites weakens the role of parents as gatekeepers who otherwise control the information about potential matches (Seth and Patnayakuni 2012). Particularly in the recent decade, so-called love marriages – as opposed to arranged marriages – have increasingly become popular, as well as the combination of those two (Netting 2010; Mukhopadhyay 2012). However, arranged endogamous marriage (i.e. within a social group) remains the norm for middle-class Indians (Fuller and Narasimhan 2008).

Earlier research has established that the higher the education a young woman has, the more say she can have in choosing a marriage partner (Bhopal 2011). At the same time, participation in tertiary education has remarkably increased the age at marriage of Indian women (Seymour 1995; Maslak and Singhal 2008; Desai and Andrist 2010) and in Asia generally (Jones 2010) during the past few decades. Fuller and Narasimhan’s (2013) research in South India confirmed that the position of women in the society has significantly improved, however, gender inequality is still deeply rooted in the domestic division of labour and in prioritising husbands’ careers over wives’.

Although highly educated women in India marry later than women without a tertiary education, the time span between the first and the second child tends to be much shorter (Banerjee 2006). Women tend to remain the primary caretakers in dual-earner couples, and because childcare facilities are not available like in Europe (Valk and Srinivasan 2011), they have to rely solely on the care support of their parents and/or extended family.

The extended family is heavily involved in child-rearing, and they are responsible for care distribution and socialisation, but this is disrupted by migration. This paper looks further into how the dense family system has to be adjusted due to migration.

## Data and methods

A qualitative approach in researching the life course of migrants allows for an understanding of the crucial ways significant others influence the life courses in general and migration trajectories in particular (Köu et al. 2015). We therefore adopted qualitative methods to get detailed accounts of the life courses of highly skilled migrants from the micro perspective. Specifically, a biographic approach assists in organising such accounts (Bailey 2009) and prioritises the social embeddedness of individuals (Halfacree and Boyle 1993).

Our results are based on interviews with 47 highly skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and UK to observe potential dissimilarities due to institutional context. The highly



skilled visa schemes in those two countries differ in terms of origins, requirements and benefits for the migrants (see Kōu and Bailey 2014). The research participants were sought among Indian migrants working in a professional sector job, aged 25–40, who were preferably holders of a knowledge migrant visa (the Netherlands) or a Highly Skilled Migrant Programme or Tier 1 or Tier 2 visa (the UK), and who had lived or intended to live in the respective country for at least one year. The recruitment sites were Amsterdam, Eindhoven and Groningen in the Netherlands, and London and Southampton in the UK as to provide a broad picture of Indian professionals in both countries in geographical terms. The data collection took place between June 2010 and August 2011. 36 participants were male and 11 female; 23 of them were married and another 11 engaged or in a relationship. All five married women moved on a dependant migrant visa, whereas all married men were primary migrants. No couples were interviewed. The majority of the participants worked in the sectors of IT services, engineering industry, business, education and research.

The first part of the interview draws from the biographic-narrative interview method (see Wengraf 2001) whereby the participant was asked to tell his or her life story in order to reveal the life events and experiences to which the participant attaches the most value. Later the narrated biography was discussed in more detail and, if necessary, additional topics were raised by the interviewer to cover the interview themes of education, employment, migration and family trajectories as well as the role of significant others in shaping these trajectories. The interview transcriptions were inductively analysed by creating codes, categories and themes with the aid of qualitative software MAXQDA. The main themes regard the mechanisms of linked lives through which parents and spouse/partner had directed these life course trajectories of the participants.

## Findings

The vast majority of participants suggested that parents in particular and extended family in general (i.e. siblings, particularly older siblings, uncles and aunts and their spouses, and grandparents) had directly or indirectly shaped their behaviour in all four life trajectories – education, employment, migration and family – examined in this study. Although the findings are discussed regarding the role of parents, members of the extended family often provided similar advice and support, which was almost always appreciated by the participants. As Ashwin (41, UK) put it: *Family is important, everything is related to that*. Because parents' influence started the earliest and extended to all domains of life, their role is discussed first, followed by the spouse/partner.

### Linked lives of parents

Three different types of influence from the family members emerged. First and foremost, parents derived their authority from the cultural norms and expectations related to traditions, for example by enforcing the normative age at marriage. Second, participants gave weight to the information provided by family members, for instance, when deciding on the specialisation for (under)graduate studies. Third, joint decision-making occurred when parents and extended family members presented the participants with different options regarding issues such as the choice of marriage partner, however, the participants



had an equal share in the final decision. Whereas in Western societies parents encourage their (adult) children towards individual decision-making and independence, in South Asian context the parents and elders are very much engaged in decision-making and children are expected to follow their advice (Deepak 2005).

While nearly all participants indicated that they had considered their parents' advice in most of their important life course decisions, some claimed they followed the advice in order to comply with the cultural norms, even if they initially were not content with the advice:

It's different here. In India, your dad is the central figure. So, he's the main person who decides. We all follow, but ... I'm happy what decisions he made, because he always sees what is the benefit for us. And we never said 'No,' me and my brother. We were not happy to go to and study in a different place and things. But at the end of the day we feel it back, 'Yes, that's a wise decision. (Aroop, 28, UK)

### *Directing the education trajectory*

Parents often advised which field of study to choose. The advice was to a large extent based on the 'market situation', regarding the current trends on the labour market as well as the prospective earnings. By and large, the preferred fields were engineering, IT and medicine. These occupations were reported as means for upward mobility among middle class, as well as for societal respect (see Kirk, Bal, and Janssen 2017; Roohi 2017). Particularly engineering and IT are in high demand also in foreign countries, thus it can be argued that parents were paving the road for their children to live and work abroad. Parents usually paid for private schooling to secure higher quality of education for their children, thus their contribution to participants' education is notable throughout the education trajectory. The three preferred fields of tertiary education were expected to lead to jobs which would provide a payoff of the investment and parents were therefore reluctant to take risks with other occupations.

Following parents' advice sometimes came at the price of neglecting own aspirations, but there was little or no space for questioning the advice. Although the lack of autonomy was not appreciated in such cases, most of the participants reported that in order to show respect they adhered to the wishes of the parents rather than followed their own ambitions:

I was forced [to study engineering] because my parents thought that was the best for me. My father thought. He has a double qualification, double degree or something. So, it didn't appear very good for him to just go for arts or science. I wanted to do something really artistic or take probably little of management, Bachelors of Management or psychology. I was totally not interested in engineering. I was forced into it by my dad and it wasn't my choice. And then, though I spoke, it didn't really work or it didn't really matter. (Sonali, 26, NL)

Not only advice, but also financial support from parents had directed the educational trajectories. Santosh (30, NL) reported that financial help from the family had made it possible to study abroad, otherwise he would have had to work for a couple of years first to earn the money himself. On the other hand, some participants stated they did not accept money from parents, because they wished to become or remain independent, both financially and in terms of life course decisions.

You just don't want to take more and more money out of them [parents], then you have to follow what they say. It comes with a price, there is no free lunch. Then I would have to marry who they say and, you know. (Shaili, 32, UK)

This kind of favour-based behaviour reasoning did not occur in the contrary case of study field selection: participants who had followed parents' advice against their own will did not expect to have more freedom of choice in other life course decisions in return.

### *Directing the migration trajectory*

Nearly all participants had made the decision for the move abroad themselves, although often after consulting with family members and friends. The parents of only one participant were initially against her wish to move to Europe for obtaining a doctoral degree, because in their traditional rural community all women were expected to become housewives and not pursue postgraduate studies or a professional career. Eventually she convinced her parents and was allowed to follow the atypical life path of a village girl.

Parents and extended family facilitated migration through personal experiences of living abroad. Some participants indicated that family members also provided financial help with costs related to travel, accommodation and tuition fees. Among high-skilled Indians, it is common to have family members who have studied or worked abroad, which has led to a situation where migration is a normative part of a person's career. The existence of a culture of migration (cf. Kandel and Massey 2002) lowers barriers to migration, as leaving family members (temporarily) behind occurs frequently. The wide-spread migration trend has led to a situation where living abroad is also seen as a means to gain status.

One category of people who move abroad are people whose parents want to send their kids abroad as a status symbol. Just like buying a sports car or having good fashion, anything. Having a foreign education and bit of an accent is something that you give your kids; it's part of what you do. (Vikram, 31, UK)

With regard to migration between the participants and their parents, two patterns were reported. The first category was temporary migration of the parents to help raise their (new-born) grandchildren. This migration pattern stems increasingly from the changing gender roles. Among the highly educated in India, women's central role as homemakers is shifting to pursuing their professional ambitions and also to contributing to the financial well-being of the (extended) family. This creates a situation where grandparents' support in child-rearing becomes vital and a grandparent temporarily migrates to help. Gender roles and gendered aspect of migration is illustrated in this migration pattern as well: it is mainly grandmothers who move in order to help with child care, making the (re-)entry into the labour market possible for the female (co-)migrants.

I decided 'Okay, now I'll look for a job to support my family and my husband.' Because my husband is the only son, he's got two sisters and he has to support his parents and his grandparents, it was a joint family. So I started working, my mother-in-law came over to help take care of the baby. (Shamila, 34, UK)

The institutional setting proved to be a key factor both in India and abroad. The institutionalised child care system is not well-developed in India due to the tradition that

grandparents and extended family members help raise the children (Singh 2014), thus if the grandparents are unable to help with child care, even higher educated women stay at home with the child for a longer period instead of returning to the labour market. Restrictive immigration policies can present an obstacle, although for the receiving country it should be attractive when the high-skilled (female) migrants participate in the labour market. However, if a long-term visa cannot be obtained for the parents, the female migrants often have to stay at home as full-time mothers if they are not able to raise their children according to their cultural norms, that is, bringing up by grandparents and/or extended family. Several participants in the Netherlands considered the parental visa maximum of three months too short a duration, whereas the six-month family visitor visa offered by the UK government did not raise any critique from the participants in the UK.

The one other main reason why people don't stay in Holland, is that ... For example, my parents are here now. Getting visa for them is a very difficult thing. You get only 90-days visa. Another friend of mine is in US. His father and mother went to visit him, they got ten-years visa! His father is not going to go there, he doesn't belong in United States, he doesn't want to go and stay there through the cold winter and all that. They stayed there for four months, five months. Life is lot more easier for them, [grandparents] take care of those kids and then go back to India. [---] It just makes it very hard for me to stay alone so far away from my parents. So a lot of people go from here back to India not because they don't like the life here, but because they can't be close to their own parents. (Rahul, 38, NL)

The second migration pattern between migrants and their parents was return migration of the highly skilled due to the 'time to look after parents' in their older ages. Family is central in India and high value is attached to close family ties, however, return migration raised the issue of independence from the family. Rakesh (31, UK) lived together with his parents until he was 26, but in hindsight would have wanted to leave the parental home at an earlier age to become more independent. Joint families are considered as a norm in India, but after adopting Western mind-set, participants anticipated potential cultural clashes when returning to India:

But even culturally it's not that acceptable [to live separately from parents]. If I moved out our home for no other reason but to live by myself ... that would immediately make things sound very suspicious. Everyone would've been like 'Oh, there's something wrong there!' It's not normal practice, even today. Although people's attitudes are changing. When I speak with my parents about moving back to India, they assume that I will come back and live with them. Although I have said that I won't be living with them. Doesn't mean that I don't want to be with them, I just got used to not having my parents around. Not that they are conservative in any way, but I think it's very difficult to change that mind-set. (Rakesh, 31, UK)

### *Directing the family trajectory*

One of the primary responsibilities of parents in India is arranging the marriage for their children (Mooney 2006). Two important factors emerged from participants' reflections on the topic: the timing of marriage – a certain 'right age' for both males and females to get married, which should be respected – and the requirements for the spousal candidate. Some mentioned the 'compatibility' of candidates, or the match of various background

characteristics such as caste, language, religion and education. A good tertiary education was a central criterion for the potential marriage partner, as all participants had completed higher education. However, the relationship is not straightforward as education can both enhance and complicate a woman's marriageability (Seymour 1995). If a young woman is 'overeducated', then finding a spouse can be very difficult, because of age issues and the common assumption that the future wife should not have a higher educational level or more degrees than the husband (cf. Fuller and Narasimhan 2008).

Among the participants there were different ways of accepting that parents would arrange their marriage. The most prevailing way was to not question this issue but to acknowledge the cultural norms and the dominant role of parents in the arranged marriage system. However, there is increasingly more space for negotiations in this matter. Almost all participants were allowed to choose between the candidates proposed by their parents, instead of parents presenting only one candidate based on the largest overlap in terms of background requirements and not taking into account the personal match/liking between the potential spouses.

One thing is support and second one is guidance you get from your parents, basically. They have more practical experience. What kind of issues could lead into your life when you have to live together. So they would be knowing you personally, your character and yourself from the birth. So they know what you are and what matters best for you. So nowadays I think it's open world and everybody's seen the world outside. It's up to them which way they want to go. It's not completely rational system, it's also a moral system. (Venkatesh, 32, NL)

However, in more traditional settings, the parents were seemingly not ready to loosen their exclusive role in finding the spouse. This, in turn, led to more resistance among the participants who wished for more freedom from the prevailing norms.

But they [parents] say like 'Okay, if you have to do your marriage by your own, if you want to choose your thing, why are we there as your parents?' I was like Okay, their mind-set is like they have their life only for their children, they are so much dedicated, so much love and affection they have, okay, that's true, but you know, it's a suffocation, right? When I discuss this point with my Indian friends here, they say 'You don't have respect for elders. (Sanjita, 25, NL)

Second, some participants let the parents arrange their marriage as a trade-off with other life course decisions that they had taken more independently. In this line of reasoning, Ravi (25, NL) summarised his views: *I've done so many things my way and my parents have accepted that (e.g. migration), now in turn I will let them arrange my marriage, that's fine with me.* This logic also worked the other way round, participants who had fully followed their parents' advice in education, employment and migration decisions, felt that they had done enough to satisfy their parents' expectations and were thus eligible to choose their partner without the decisive power of the parents.

### ***Linked life of the spouse/partner***

While parents' influence on the life course choices made by the participants was extended to all four major life course trajectories studied in this paper (education, employment,

migration and family) through complying with norms, providing information or joint decision-making, the role of the spouse/partner in shaping the life course mainly concerns joint decision-making in migration and family trajectories. In the pre-relationship/pre-marriage stage, the participants had to take into account only the (anticipated) changes in their own life course, whereas as a couple the aspirations, needs and wishes of the spouse/partner became equally important when making life course plans and decisions. However, in case of migration, the husband often seemed to be the primary decision-maker.

### *Directing the education and employment trajectories*

In most cases, the participants or their spouse had to leave their job in India or other country of residence for the family reunion in the Netherlands or UK. In this situation, all participants considered it crucial to secure relevant employment or (post-)graduate education for their spouses. The traditional housewife was not a common role among the spouses: the dominant mentality in India is that if one is abroad, one has to work and make the maximum use of time abroad to earn capital for further life (Osella and Osella 2009). Mutual employment opportunities were also central among participants planning a future career in India:

I don't want her to become a housewife. I also want her to engage in some sort of work she's interested in. And so I applied [for a job] in Bangalore, I applied in Hyderabad, and I applied in Delhi, I applied in Bombay. I applied in all these, you know, A-class cities, metropolitan cities. Where she can also have some opportunity, I can also have some opportunity, so both of us can make a good family. (Pratul, 28, UK)

High-skilled migrant visa schemes can play a considerable role in facilitating the labour market access of linked movers (Köu 2016). In the Netherlands and UK such policies extend residence and work permits to the spouse, which the research participants in both countries regarded pivotal for career opportunities and general well-being of the spouse. For instance, Sonali (26, NL) estimated that her career would have had a long delay without the spousal benefits of her husband's high-skilled migrant visa. Shashi (39, UK) had previously lived in the USA with his family, where his wife was willing to work, but could not do so due to restrictive visa regulations and experienced concurrent staying at home as a *semi-voluntary prison sentence*.

Some male participants reported how they had made a change in their career so that their wives could follow professional ambitions, or took on a career path that enabled them to spend more time with family instead of putting long hours into workplace. For instance, Bharat (35, UK) had a well-paid job in sailing as an officer and made good career progression, however, the job required him to be at sea for five months at a time. After being married for some time, he decided to quit his career at sea to be able to be together with his wife on a daily basis.

I could have, you know, been a captain of a ship. So sometimes I do miss that, but I think I do understand that this normal life what I have now is very good. I go to work and in the evening I come back, I'm home with family, so it's like a normal life, you see. When you make this kind of compromise, because of family, I think this is also quite important, although when you are at sea you would really get paid well, but ... You know, for the sake of family and future, I kind of decided that it's fine. (Bharat, 35, UK)

### *Directing the migration trajectory*

Being in a relationship with or married to a highly skilled migrant almost inevitably implies migration. Due to the prevailing patrilocality in India, a woman is expected to move to her husband's home, thus putting women in the position of tied internal migrants. Most of the spouses were open for new opportunities in a new country, but a few revealed that they only moved abroad to join their husbands and that they would have preferred to stay in India. Although they were initially in the role of a tied mover, each one of them eventually found relevant employment or postgraduate studies matching their qualifications and skills.

At that time [before marriage] my wife was working in Chennai. She was working with a good company. She was a very career-oriented person, you know. So she had to leave that job that time simply because she was getting married to me. It's like in the culture, where the husband goes, the wife has to go. (Bharat, 35, UK)

Coming to the Netherlands was not my decision at all. It was his [husband's]. And he almost forced it on me, though he thinks he has asked me and we were quite okay but ... [---] I could have put my foot down and said not to move at all, but I didn't want to spoil his enthusiasm. And I had taken a break away from job, for myself, so ... Well, though it may sound like a sacrifice, it's really not [laughs]. (Sonali, 26, NL)

Patrilocality, however, did not seem to apply to female participants who were single, but aimed to get married.<sup>2</sup> For an arranged marriage they expected their parents to find (Indian) spousal candidates who were currently living in their country of residence or who would be willing to move there after getting married. Geographical location and likely requirement to migrate for union formation were also mentioned in combination with eventual return migration to India:

Because my parents also searched for persons who match me, who have permanent residence, the Green Card in USA or permanent residence in European countries. Then I said no, because I don't want my ... person to have permanent residence here. If they have it here, they never come back to India. And I want to go back. (Sanjita 25, NL)

### *Directing the family trajectory*

To a certain extent, the events in parallel life course careers seemed to co-occur less frequently for women than men: the female participants had a strong preference of completing (post)graduate studies before entering the family trajectory. On the other hand, some men also reported to bring sacrifices to meet their long-term goals: they focused only on work for a number of years in order to have a better future in terms of career prospects, sufficient savings and starting a family. Migration may thus lead to postponement of marriage and childbirth.

I came here for professional life. I'm too busy with my work. Start at nine, finish at eight, sometimes I'll be busy in the weekends as well. So no time for personal life. Because I want to grow professionally. [---] Some things are happening in European market. That has created lot of opportunities for professionals. It's going to be there for another two or three years, I want to make most of this. For I don't want to have any commitment at this time. That's why I'm not having any personal side. (Amit, 30, UK)

It is like investment of your time for 4–5 years, and make sacrifices. Not in touch with family, your friends, just devote your time and energy on your research, write some good papers. And grow as a researcher and make a good network. And then apply in Indian universities, go, get a job there. And then go back, and settle down. I can see myself next year: I am sitting in some good academic organisation in India, as an assistant professor. And also get married to my long-last girlfriend. That was kind of the bigger picture. Both sides were happy to sacrifice this four years' or five years' time of our life, so that our next phase of life would be good. (Pratul, 28, UK)

The links between the lives of the couples can thus bring about a variety of migration accounts and these accounts depend largely on the employment or education trajectories of both partners. For spouse migration, key trajectory is that of employment. The gender component is strongly present, as by and large, the male makes the migration decision and the woman follows. Our findings suggest, however, that even if women are tied movers during the migration event itself, they enter the labour market in a short time, particularly if the institutional conditions are favourable.

## Conclusion

This paper explored how parents, extended family and spouse/partner shape the life course decisions of high-skilled Indian migrants in the Netherlands and UK. Our findings showcase substantial impact of linked lives on various levels throughout the life course and in multiple trajectories. The more people are involved in life course decision-making, the more complex the process becomes.

While in Western literature migration is generally considered an individual or (nuclear) household phenomenon, the Indian context adds to the constellation a strong presence of extended family in general and parents in particular. Their prominent role in decision-making is visible throughout the life course. It is important to look at the migration process as a whole (Köu and Bailey 2014), however, previous literature has often focused only on the role of family members in pre- or post-migration stages. This supports Pixley's (2008, 158) plea for analysing 'patterns of multiple decisions over the life course rather than relying only on the observations of individual geographic moves found in most migration research'. Our study contributes to the knowledge of how parents and extended family shape the life course in general and migration decisions in particular. First, family members facilitate migration through a migration norm, educational choices and by means of financial support. Second, the migration experience is influenced by negotiating social norms and expectations with family members, as well as by providing support for child care. Finally, future migration plans are largely directed by care-giving for parents and care of grandchildren.

Our findings suggest that different actors have different roles in directing the life course stages. The Indian social norm of the (extended) family being actively involved predetermines the educational and marital choices to a large extent, whereas the different stages in the care-giving cycle reveal cultural schemas regarding age-role behaviour and often can trigger the migration of and to the parents. Parental influence takes a large share in one's pre-relationship/pre-marriage life, while in post-marriage stage the spouse has increasingly more impact on the decision-making than the parents. Whereas in other domains joint decision-making occurred within the couples, the male spouses tended to initiate



migration, however, having in mind the professional opportunities for their wives in the country of destination.

As migration creates an exposure to Western cultural and social environment, Indian norms are consequently often less valued or become irrelevant in the Western cultural milieu (cf. Gardner and Osella 2003). Family ties are still highly valued, but at the same time the high-skilled migrants are more independent from their families due to both distance created by migration and their higher educational levels and career development. The importance of parental advice is also changing: due to the geographical distance between the participants and their parents, the local (non-Indian) context plays a bigger role and thus the need for and timing of conformity with norms can be postponed in case of the highly skilled. However, parents are not only a regulating authority but also a source of support, particularly for care provision in a transnational family. Respect to values is also beneficial for migrants: it gives a sense of belonging to family in India and retains links with homeland, especially when preparing to return.

In Indian society, family values are highly honoured, whereas in the Western societies the individual is central. Migration can therefore be viewed as a pathway towards individualism, especially in the gender dimension. Women have more independence and an equal say within marriage as they are also highly skilled, which gives them different bargaining power than the less-educated. 'Through the migration process and as a result of increased access to education women can actively transform and modify transitions' (Samuel 2010, 108) and hence the need for conforming parents' strict expectations and cultural norms, such as age at marriage or childbirth, is renegotiated to a certain degree.

In terms of the institutional setting, our findings point out that for facilitating high-skilled migration, the availability of not only spousal benefits but also parental visa is relevant. A major difference we observed between the two countries was that the participants in the Netherlands experienced the visa regulations as restrictive for their parents, which was considered a substantial disadvantage in the light of the central role of grandparents in child-rearing in India. The Dutch knowledge migrant policies are mainly focused on filling profitable jobs and pay less attention to social and cultural aspects, which are equally important from the point of view of the migrants. Thus far, the policies have been geared towards nuclear family and are therefore unaccommodating for grandparents whose role in the migration process has not been acknowledged. One of the main contributions of parents of migrants is helping with child care and therefore directly or indirectly enabling the migrant couple to maintain dual careers.

With a focus on linked lives we have been able to evaluate the role of significant others in the life courses of migrants. The findings of this paper suggest that research on linked lives cannot be limited to one geographical area or to the immediate nuclear family. Allowing a broader focus will enrich our understanding of family life in transnational settings.

## Notes

1. The names of persons and places are fictitious in order to protect the anonymity of the participants.
2. However, none of the female participants had got married after migration, thus the migration of a male spouse concerns migration plans, not actual behaviour.

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